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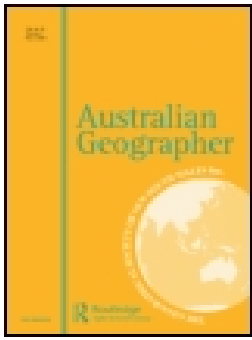
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Rural cosmopolitanism at the frontier? Chinese farmers and community relations in northern Queensland, c.1890–1920

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the experiences of Chinese settlers in the Cairns district of northern Queensland, Australia, at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as a potential early expression of a 'rural cosmopolitanism' that has more recently been associated in the geographical literature with contemporary international migration. In contrast to other parts of Australia, where Chinese immigration was associated with mining and with racial tensions and segregation, Chinese settlers around Cairns tended to be farmers and store-keepers, and contemporary accounts hint at a degree of tolerance and cross-community interaction that suggests an early form of rural cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the mobilities and aspirations of the Chinese migrants prefigure those of present-day 'cosmopolitan' migrants, whilst the discourses of anti-Chinese agitators are echoed in the concerns, fears and prejudices of current anti-immigration sentiments. Drawing on in-depth archival research, the paper documents the dynamics, experiences and relationships of Chinese settlers and debates concerning their presence, from the 1880s to the depletion of the community in the 1910s under pressure from anti-Chinese legislation. In so doing, the paper seeks to draw lessons from this historical perspective for our understanding of international migration to rural areas, and for the possibilities for rural cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century.

KEYWORDS

Cosmopolitanism; Chinese immigration; rural; race relations; Queensland; historical geography; archival research

Introduction

The acceleration and intensification of international migration is rapidly becoming one of the defining features of the early twenty-first century, with destabilising and polarising political effects. A key characteristic of contemporary global migration is the movement of international migrants beyond the conventional 'gateway' cities of the post-war era, into 'new immigrant destinations' in rural and peripheral region locations in Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand, encouraged by a combination of labour shortages in traditional rural industries, resettlement policies for refugees and asylum seekers, and environmental factors. In popular political discourse, the growth of

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immigrant populations in rural localities (as well as fears of anticipated immigration) has been associated with reactionary support for populist and anti-immigration parties, including support for One Nation in rural and peri-urban Australia (Badcock 1998; Pritchard and McManus 2000; see also Strijker, Voerman, and Terluin 2015 for international examples). More positively, geographers and sociologists have documented the integration and accommodation of diverse migrant groups in rural communities, producing new social formations which some commentators have labelled an emergent 'rural cosmopolitanism' (Popke 2011; Schech 2014; Woods 2017).

Both these approaches tend to implicitly reproduce the established historical binary of the cosmopolitan city and the non-cosmopolitan countryside, with rural localities perceived as mono-cultural societies (or in certain regions as compositions of segregated parallel mono-cultural communities), thus assuming diverse immigration and subsequent multi-cultural engagement to be a relatively new phenomenon. However, this assumption ignores not only evidence of historical diverse populations in rural communities (Bressey 2009), but also the active and frequently violent production of large regions of Australia, New Zealand and North America as predominantly 'white' spaces through the displacement, containment and extermination of Indigenous peoples, and the restriction and exclusion of competing non-white migrant groups. Furthermore, it ignores fragmentary evidence that prior to the imposition of the white colonial countryside, rural frontier regions formed liminal spaces in which more ethnically mixed communities could exist with cordial inter-cultural relations that resonate with twenty-first-century experiences, even perhaps exhibiting aspects of a proto-rural cosmopolitanism.

This paper explores one such space, the agricultural frontier region of northern Queensland in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, where contemporary accounts suggest that an ethnically diverse population of European settlers, Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Javanese migrants, Pacific Island labourers, and Aboriginal communities were engaged in negotiating a form of co-existence that diverged from the hegemonic discourse of 'white Australia'. In particular, the economic contribution of Chinese migrants as farmers and entrepreneurs in the district around Cairns, and their social interactions with European settlers, has been suggested to stand in contrast to the dominant narrative of the Chinese experience in Australia. This paper aims to investigate the evidence for such claims, and to evaluate them through the lens of cosmopolitanism. It will consider the significance of the rural, peripheral, location of the Cairns district in creating conditions for inter-cultural engagement, and examine the pressures and dynamics that eventually led to the closing down of cultural diversity and the assertion of a more mono-cultural Euro-centric society. In asking these questions, the paper further aims to identify lessons from the experiences of late colonial Cairns for the study of emergent rural cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century and, more broadly, to reflect on the potential for historical geography research to inform understanding of present-day issues.

Retrofitting rural cosmopolitanism?

As an idea that has been advanced independently by several authors, the concept of 'rural cosmopolitanism' has a number of different emphases even within its small and developing literature. For Aguayo (2008), Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) and Notar (2008), rural cosmopolitanism is aligned with the opening-up of rural communities to

trans-national and trans-cultural connections, mobilities and influences, and the consequent hybrid reconstitution of these localities. This perspective identifies cosmopolitanism as a property of individuals, and focuses on the role of circular migrants, diasporic communities and tourists as cosmopolitan agents, exploring case studies drawn primarily from the Global South, in Latin America, India and China. In contrast, Schech (2014), Torres, Popke, and Hapke (2006) and Woods (2017) deploy rural cosmopolitanism to refer to the negotiation of cultural difference in rural localities in Australia, North America and Europe that have recently experienced substantial immigration, particularly by labour migrants and refugees. This body of work emphasises the limitations and contingencies of the emergent rural cosmopolitanism as a property of communities, with relations between migrants and established rural residents described as a 'silent bargain' that acknowledges economic necessity but restricts social integration (Torres, Popke, and Hapke 2006; Schech 2014), or as precariously vulnerable to shifts in economic or political environments (Woods 2017). Popke (2011) extends the perspective by positioning rural cosmopolitanism as an ethical project (following Keith 2005), which seeks not only to describe the 'kinds of coexistence and connection characteristic of rural areas' (Popke 2011, 252) but also to 'expand and politicize our sense of throwntogetherness, and to see in this a rationale for a wider net of engagement and responsibility' (253). However, despite their different emphasises, these contributions can be read as complementary, highlighting different aspects of a broad emergent rural cosmopolitanism that is multi-faceted, multi-scalar, contested and precarious (see Woods 2017).

Moreover, the variants of existing accounts of rural cosmopolitanism also tend to share an empirical focus on rural localities that have been transformed by recent dynamics of transnational migration (either in- our out-) or international tourism, implicitly if inadvertently reproducing the conventional historical binary of the cosmopolitan city and the non-cosmopolitan countryside. Yet this assumption has been increasingly challenged both by research aimed at uncovering minority ethnic histories in rural societies (Bressey 2009) and by studies that have documented evidence of historical cosmopolitanism in essentially rural peripheral or borderland locations. Fewkes (2012), for instance, has argued that cosmopolitan communities existed in the rural Ladakh region in northern India in the early twentieth century, as involvement in the global trade of commodities such as cotton, synthetic dyes and opiates created cross-cultural interactions and required traders in the region to understand and negotiate global markets and cultural differences. Robertson (2014), meanwhile, describes the 'ambivalent cosmopolitanism' of eighteenth-century Jamaica, as ideas and cultural fashions from Europe were circulated through the institutions and networks of colonial towns and to rural plantations.

In the above cases, cosmopolitanism was found to have flourished in non-metropolitan settings that were nonetheless sites of exchange and transit, thus exhibiting a liminality between different territorial regimes. Further studies have also pointed to the possibility for cosmopolitan expression in more remote, peripheral rural regions at the frontiers of empire, where the surveillance capacities of the state were limited and where the norms of colonial society were not inscribed. Such spaces arguably included the interior, northern and western regions of Australia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which formed contact zones between pioneer European settlers, Indigenous communities, and migrants and indentured workers from Asia and the Pacific Islands. Investigation of the diverse cultural histories of these regions has formed part of a broader project re-

conceptualising inter-cultural relations in Australia and re-examining its historical geographies of migration and racial engagement (Anderson 2000; Anderson and Taylor 2005; Fitzgerald 2007; Ang 2014), which has included deconstructing the framing of Australian ethnic and migration research around a white-minority binary (Ramsay 2004). As such, studies have pointed to examples of co-existence of European and non-European populations, as well as the dynamics of interaction between Asian, Aboriginal and other non-white groups beyond the colonial/metropolitan core. Ramsay (2004), for example, documents cross-cultural connections between Indigenous and Chinese residents on Thursday Island in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; whilst Yu (1999) describes the entwined lives and 'creole' culture of Aboriginal and Asian (mainly Chinese, Japanese and Malay) people on the Kimberley coast over the same period; and Ramsay (2003), again, analyses the co-production of 'Chinatown' in the Cherbourg Aboriginal settlement by both Chinese and Aboriginal residents.

These examples recount cross-cultural co-operation borne from shared experiences of oppression by, and defiance towards, European-Australian rule, and cases of proto-cosmopolitan relations between white and non-white communities are less well evidenced. One of the few exceptions is Lancashire's (2004) study of pre-federation Chinese and European relations in the township of Wahgunyah on the border of Victoria and New South Wales, which he describes as 'generally a mutually beneficial and harmonious arrangement' (191). Lancashire attributes the cordial co-existence to recognition of the economic contribution of Chinese labour, but also more broadly to the township's rural setting:

The lack of strong anti-Chinese sentiment from European Australians may be more representative of a dichotomy of social and community values between regional Australia and the large urban population centres from where major policy and the legislative agendas of governments tend to originate. Within rural communities there was closer interaction between Chinese and Europeans, and where Chinese participation in the economy was valued, there may indeed have been a much greater tolerance of Chinese than has been portrayed from the nineteenth century urban perspective. (Lancashire 2004, 201)

This conclusion raises a number of intriguing questions as to the prevalence of harmonious relations between races in more rural districts of Australia in the late colonial era and the particular 'rural' factors that might serve to explain any observed tendencies towards closer interactions. These may be postulated as a series of research questions, which are investigated in this paper:

- Can other examples of harmonious relations between ethnic groups in rural areas of Australia at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries be identified?
- What form did such relations take, and to what extent did they exhibit characteristics that might be described as 'cosmopolitan' in the sense employed in studies of modern rural cosmopolitanism?
- Did the rurality of a locale play a role in creating the conditions for cosmopolitan engagement, as studies of modern rural cosmopolitanism suggest?
- If proto-rural cosmopolitan societies did exist, why did they not survive, and as such, what can be learned from their rise and fall for analysing modern expressions of cosmopolitanism in rural localities, and for rural cosmopolitanism as an ethical and political project?

These questions are examined through an empirical examination of the Cairns district of northern Queensland around the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. At this time, the district hosted a diverse, multi-cultural population, including a notable Chinese community. Although the significance of the Chinese population around Cairns was widely recognised in contemporary documents of the era—resonating with Lancashire’s description of Wahgunyah—it has been largely neglected or marginalised in later histories both of the region and of the Chinese experience in Australia, with the exception of a few largely empirical, essentially local histories (Cronin 1973; May 1974, 1976a, 1976b, 1984; Fitzgerald 1990; Richards 2010).

Methods and sources

The narrative presented in this paper is based on analysis of primary and secondary documentary data sources, focused in particular on the 1901 census district of Cairns which comprised the town of Cairns, the smaller settlements of Geraldton (later Innisfail), Mareeba and Redlynch, and the surrounding rural hinterlands including the Barron, Johnstone and Mulgrave river valleys; as well as the neighbouring towns of Atherton, Mossman and Port Douglas and their rural hinterlands (see Figure 1). Statistics and contemporary accounts relating to Cooktown and Herberton, the next nearest towns, were also collected where these related to direct connections with Cairns or illustrated similar experiences.

The main source of primary data examined was the National Library of Australia’s TROVE digital archive of historical newspapers. Archives of the *Cairns Post* (CP) (also known as the *Morning Post* (MP) between 1893 and 1907 and the *Cairns Morning Post* (CMP) from 1907 to 1909) were systematically searched from the newspaper’s foundation in 1884 to 1930, using search terms including ‘Chinese’, ‘China’, ‘Immigration’, ‘Land Selection’, ‘Sugar’, ‘Banana’, ‘Rice’, ‘Farmers’, ‘Agriculture’, ‘Kanaka’, ‘Japanese’ and the names of prominent local Chinese and non-Chinese residents.¹ A number of other Queensland newspapers—including the *Brisbane Courier* (BC), *The Capricornian*, *Morning Bulletin* (MB), *North Queensland Register* (NQR), *Northern Herald* (NH), *Northern Mining Register* (NMR), *Queensland Country Life* (QCL), *Queensland Times* (QT), *The Queenslander*, *Townsville Daily Bulletin* (TDB), and *The Worker*—were also searched with a more restricted range of search terms, in order to capture items not covered in the *Cairns Post* and to analyse external representations of Cairns, noting Evans, Saunders, and Cronin’s (1993) observation that weekly titles such as the *The Queenslander* and *The Worker* played a significant role in promoting anti-Chinese sentiment. These searches combined produced 831 articles which were downloaded, read and coded. In the interests of brevity, references to newspaper sources are cited using the abbreviations indicated above.

Primary data were also sourced from contemporary documents held by Queensland State Archives and the John Oxley Library at the State Library of Queensland, including Queensland Government papers and correspondence on Chinese immigration, the Police Census of Aliens in 1908, and the *Sugar Industry Act*; records of land selections and Certificates of Exemption from the ‘Dictation Test’; and ephemera, such as a brochure for the 40th anniversary of cane-farming in Innisfail. Contemporary writings, including memoirs of local residents and visitors and early local histories of the

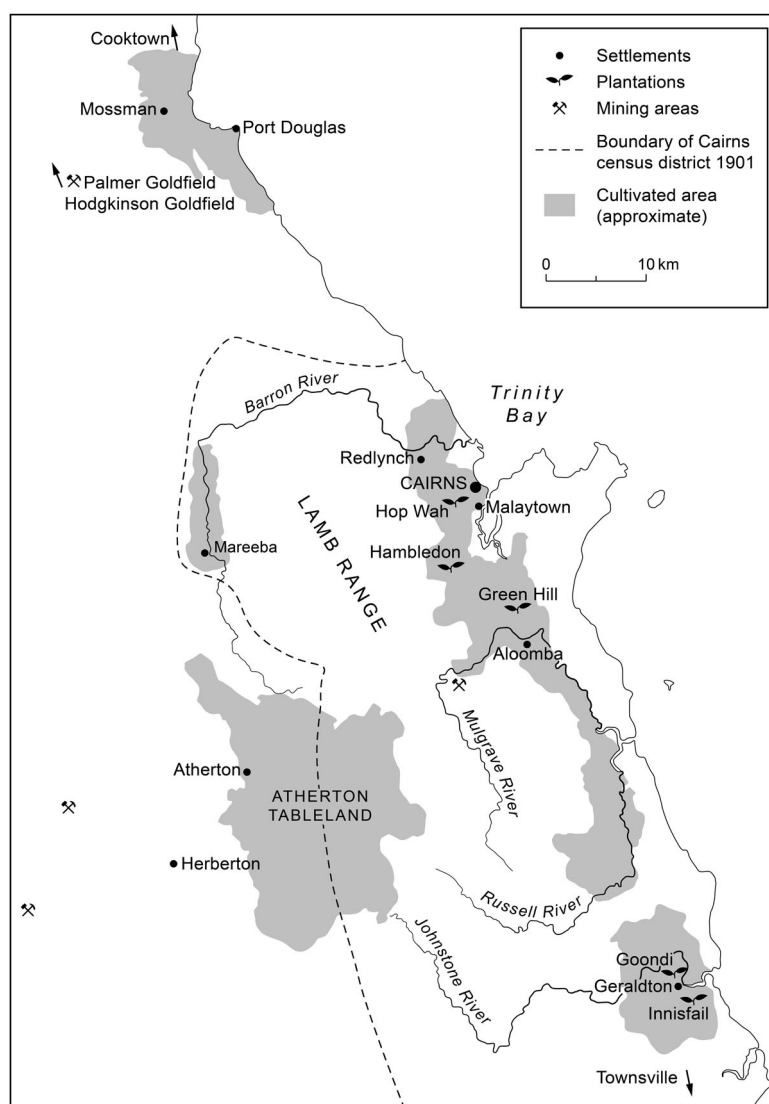


Figure 1. Map of the Cairns district, northern Queensland, c.1900.

district, were also examined, as well as secondary sources including more recent local histories and family histories of Chinese-Australian families, and academic studies of the Chinese in Australia, variously held by the State Library of Queensland and the University of Queensland Library. In particular, May's historical research on the Chinese in Cairns between 1870 and 1920 (May 1976a, 1976b, 1984) and Evans, Saunders, and Cronin's (1993) history of race relations in colonial Queensland have been drawn on for their empirical detail and narrative accounts, but wherever possible original sources cited by May or Evans, Saunders, and Cronin have been checked and cited. Population statistics were obtained from the censuses of 1891, 1896, 1901, 1911 and 1921, as presented in reports held by the University of Queensland Library.

The Chinese in nineteenth-century Australia and the Cairns exception

The conventional narrative of the Chinese experience in Australia is dominated by conflict with European settlers, and increasing victimisation and exclusion as anti-Chinese political agitation swelled during the nineteenth century culminating in a series of discriminatory legislation. The first Chinese migrants had been brought to Australia as indentured labour for pastoral agriculture in the 1840s (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993), but Chinese immigration exploded following the discovery of gold in New South Wales and Victoria in 1851. Chinese miners worked the goldfields on a credit-ticket system, segregated from but in competition with European miners, with whom relations were hostile and increasingly violent (Choi 1975). Antagonism towards Chinese miners led to legislation restricting Chinese immigration to Victoria, South Australia and New South Wales, but not initially to Queensland, where Chinese were more agriculturally focused (rather than mining), and where planters sought Asian labour for their new plantations (Choi 1975; Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993).

The discovery of gold on the Palmer River, north-west of Cairns, in 1873, and elsewhere in northern and central Queensland changed the situation, with up to 25 000 Chinese miners estimated to be working the Palmer rush at its peak (Evans 2007). Clashes between Chinese and European miners were reported on most goldfields between 1867 and 1877, and although the presence of Chinese miners rapidly dwindled after 1880, fears that the north of the colony could become a majority Asian region, lost to European settlers, gained popular traction in Queensland and fuelled anti-Chinese opinion across the colonies.

The resulting desire for greater independence from Britain and a perception that co-ordination was required to control Chinese immigration contributed to the federation of the Australian colonies and passing of the national *Immigration Restriction Act* in 1901. White nationalist sentiments prevailed in the new Commonwealth, articulated in the cry of 'White Australia', and segregation, suppression and exclusion of non-European groups increased (Taylor 2013). One notable exception where relations between Europeans and Chinese migrants appeared to contemporary observers to be amicable, even convivial, was in the agricultural district of Cairns.² As the *Cairns Post* reported in 1891:

By an unfortunate combination of circumstances Cairns has of late become somewhat notorious for her pro-Chinese proclivities, so much so, indeed, that our neighbours say people can always recognise a Cairns man because he invariably takes off his hat to a Chinaman. (*CP*, February 11, 1891, 2)

A month later, the newspaper opined that 'with regard to the Chinese the town is in a very considerable state of backwardness' (*CP*, March 21, 1891, 2), and in 1897 a visiting land surveyor noted that 'so far as can be gathered there is no ill feeling between Chinese and Europeans in Cairns' (quoted by May 1976a, 287–288). Attempts to mobilise anti-Chinese campaigns by visiting agitator John Potts in 1886 had met with opposition in Cairns, Cooktown and Port Douglas, and in 1900 the Queensland Premier referred in a parliamentary debate to a petition that he had received 'signed by a great number of well-known people in Cairns, stating that the Chinese were the backbone of the place' (*NQR*, November 5, 1900, 22).

Creating Cairns: early settlement and agricultural development

The port of Cairns was established in 1876 as part of the European settlement of northern Queensland, providing access to interior mining areas. Early race relations around the settlement were fractious, with frequent skirmishes reported with the Aboriginal population, and a blockade by local residents frustrating the first attempt to land Chinese immigrants at the harbour the same year (MP, November 19, 1907; also Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). A year later, Chinese settlers were excluded from the neighbouring town of Port Douglas (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). Attitudes shifted with the decline of the Palmer River and Hodgkinson goldfields and the reorientation of the district's economy towards agriculture. The agricultural transformation of the uncultivated landscape was a labour-intensive activity in harsh tropical conditions, and the substantial labour demand was met primarily by Asian, Pacific Islander and Indigenous Australian workers, including Chinese tenant farmers.

By 1886 there were 1287 Chinese nationals resident in the Cairns census district, comprising over a quarter of the recorded population. The local distribution of this population reflected its agrarian character, with 80 per cent of Chinese residents living in rural areas outside the small town of Cairns, a pattern repeated in adjacent districts. Hence, Chinese residents comprised less than a fifth of the population in Cairns town, but over a third of the population in the Cairns hinterland, as well as in Geraldton, Port Douglas and the Barron Valley, and three-quarters of the population in the hinterland of Port Douglas (see Table 1) (May 1976b). By 1901, the Chinese population in the Cairns census district had exceeded 2000 people, forming the largest concentration of Chinese nationals in Queensland, and accounting for over a fifth of the Chinese population in the State (Queensland Government 1901).

The Chinese community expanded despite substantial impediments from anti-Asian legislation. The *Aliens Act 1861* had prohibited non-naturalised non-Europeans from owning freehold land in Queensland and required Asians to have been in Queensland for at least 3 years and to be living with their spouse in order to apply for citizenship. These provisions were aimed expressly at Chinese migrants who were predominantly men with families in China (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). Nonetheless, an arrangement developed in which landowners acquired land selections and leased plots to Chinese tenants for periods of 7 or 8 years. The Chinese tenant farmers would clear the scrubland

Table 1. Distribution of Chinese in the Cairns area, 1886 census

| | Chinese | Total population | % Chinese |
|----------------------------------|---------|------------------|-----------|
| <i>Cairns Census District</i> | | | |
| Cairns town | 244 | 1376 | 17.7 |
| Cairns hinterland | 471 | 1208 | 38.9 |
| Mulgrave/Russell | 42 | 327 | 12.8 |
| Geraldton | 530 | 1724 | 30.7 |
| <i>Cook Census District</i> | | | |
| Port Douglas town | 142 | 354 | 40.1 |
| Port Douglas hinterland | 487 | 640 | 76.1 |
| <i>Herberton Census District</i> | | | |
| Barron Valley | 104 | 298 | 34.8 |
| Western tin-fields | 51 | 807 | 6.3 |
| Herberton | 103 | 1241 | 8.4 |

Source: adapted from May (1976b).

or forest and cultivate the land, usually for fruit, sugar-cane or maize, which they would sell for income and pay rent to the landowner. At the end of the lease the selection would return to the landowner, and the tenant would either move on to a new selection or return to China (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993; Jenkinson 2006).

A few Chinese migrants became naturalised and took up their right to own land outright. Land selection records for 1893, for instance, show the purchase of land by Sarah Ah Ching (wife of James Ah Ching, one of the first Chinese parties to arrive in Cairns in 1876) and by Andrew Leon, a prominent local Chinese entrepreneur. In 1881, Andrew Leon had also assembled a consortium of Chinese investors in Cooktown and Hong Kong and purchased 518 ha (1280 acres) outside Cairns to establish the Hop Wah Plantation, with an almost entirely Chinese workforce. The plantation struggled for 5 years to grow first cotton and then sugar-cane before problems with poor harvests, falling sugar prices and a lack of capital forced its sale in 1886 (Bolton and Cronin 1974; *BC*, April 18, 1882; *Capricornian*, November 16, 1901; *Queenslander*, November 7, 1885). Nonetheless, the Hop Wah Plantation was admired locally and nationally, and was credited with demonstrating that sugar could be grown in the locality (*Queenslander*, December 10, 1887).

A second Chinese consortium, the Gee Wah Company, purchased the Green Hills Plantation south of Cairns from the Colonial Sugar Company in 1901, and similarly attracted acclaim for its cultivation of over 1600 ha (4000 acres) of sugar-cane, described by a visiting parliamentary delegation in 1905 as ‘the finest and cleanest crop seen during the whole tour’ (*QT*, June 6, 1905; also Ling 2001; *Capricornian*, June 10, 1905). Further south, at Geraldton, the business interests of Tam Sie included the Innisfail Plantation, with around 1200 ha (3000 acres) of banana cultivation, and the Basilisk sugar and cattle farm (Innisfail Cane Jubilee Committee 1930; *CMP*, May 12, 1909; *TDB*, October 26, 1931).

At the 1901 census, the recorded population of the Cairns census district—just over 11 000 people—included at least 25 nationalities by birth, with notable groups not only of white Australian-born, British-born and Chinese residents, but also of Pacific Islander, Japanese, India, Malay and Scandinavian migrants (Figure 2).³ Relations between these ethnic groups were structured by a strict racial hierarchy, according to prejudices of the time, in which the Chinese migrants occupied a middle position below Europeans but above Pacific Islanders and Indigenous Australians (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). The hierarchy was reflected in labour and property relations—with Chinese renting land from Europeans and employing Pacific Islander and Aboriginal workers—and in differential wages (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993).

The negotiation of cultural difference in the district thus involved not only relations between Europeans and Chinese but also between Europeans and numerous other non-European groups, and between Chinese and other non-European groups. Chinese and Japanese migrants generally lived in close proximity, and Chinese merchants serviced Malay, Indian, Javanese and Pacific Islander communities, but May (1984) notes evidence of antagonism towards the Chinese from these groups, who ‘resented the economic dominance of the Chinese and the exploitative aspect of economic relations’ (208). At the same time, there is evidence that Chinese employers paid Pacific Islander and Aboriginal workers more than European employers, provided housing and food, and shared tobacco and water. The nature of these relations, however, was contested, with Chinese

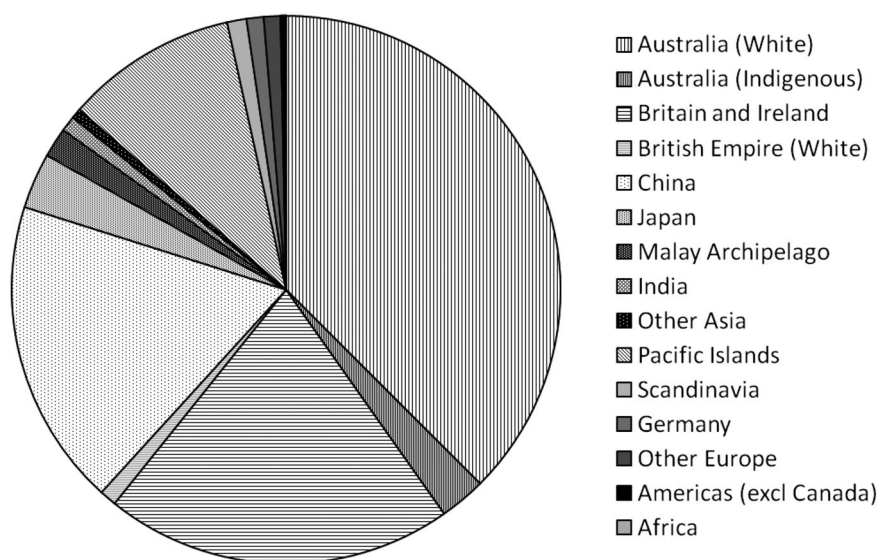


Figure 2. Population of the Cairns census district by birthplace, 1901 census. Source: Queensland Government (1901).

farmers accused of supplying Indigenous Australians with alcohol and opium and prohibited from employing ‘coloured labour’ after 1898 (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993).

The different ethnic populations were, on occasion, played against each other by the European majority to service their own political and economic interests. Most notably, the unsuccessful mobilisation in 1901 of European landowners and merchants against legislation to prohibit the employment of indentured Pacific Islander (‘Kanakan’) labour on plantations—championed by a loose alliance of white nationalists and anti-slavery campaigners—involved representations that Pacific Islanders were more reliable and less threatening immigrants than the Chinese (*MP*, April 21, 1900, May 12, 1900, August 18, 1903). This manufactured trade-off between Chinese and Pacific Islander labour, and reactions to subsequent suggestions that Chinese workers might be forcibly relocated from other Australian States to replace Pacific Islander labour on sugar plantations (*MP*, September 13, 1904), marked a hardening of European attitudes towards Chinese migrants that contrasted with the broader reputation of the Cairns district for the openness of inter-cultural relations, as discussed further below.

Cosmopolitan Cairns? Mobilities, interactions and attitudes

By the end of the nineteenth century the Cairns district was a vibrant economy with a growing and diverse multi-national population, in which members of the Chinese community in particular were actively engaged in agricultural production and commerce alongside European settlers. Yet it was also characterised by a strict racial hierarchy, tensions between ethnic groups, and shifting public discourses on immigration reflecting wider political developments. As such, the predominant culture appears to fall short of modern notions of ‘cosmopolitanism’, but equally evidence can be observed of practices

and dispositions that exhibit cosmopolitan tendencies. The following sections examine this evidence by considering in turn the role of Chinese migrants to Queensland as mobile, cosmopolitan agents; the performance of social and commercial interactions between European and Chinese residents in the district; and the articulation of attitudes by Europeans towards the Chinese community. In doing so, it asks questions that map on to the characteristics of rural cosmopolitanism outlined earlier in the paper, including whether the transformational effect of individuals straddling cultural worlds, or facilitating the mobility of fashions and ideas, can be identified among the Chinese migrants or European settlers. Is there evidence of conviviality in the inter-cultural relations of Europeans, Chinese and other population groups? Do members of the Cairns community appear to demonstrate any sign of negotiating their own role in multiple cultural spheres? And, is there any indication of a cosmopolitan ethics emerging in Cairns at the time in the shape of openness to difference?

Chinese migrants as cosmopolitan agents

The links between cosmopolitanism and mobility are articulated by Hannerz's (1990) distinction between 'cosmopolitans' and 'locals', and reproduced by Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan (2003) and Notar (2008) in their work on rural cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitans not only travel between different cultures, but through their mobility they act as agents of transformation in the places they travel from and to. The Chinese migrants in northern Queensland originated mostly from rural areas of Guangdong province (also known as Canton or Kwangtung) in southern China, where pressures of food insecurity and land shortages had initiated a pattern of cyclical migration by men, working temporarily in Australia, New Zealand or North America to support families in China and returning every few years (Choi 1975). This inherent mobility of Chinese migrants contrasted with the sedentary (and thus non-cosmopolitan) instincts of European migrants (Coleborne 2015), generating distrust and the labelling of the Chinese as 'sojourners' (Rolls 1992), not real colonists, hence justifying the discouragement of Chinese immigration.

Yet, in the Cairns district, the mobility of Chinese migrants may be argued to have strengthened colonisation and agricultural development. The regular movement of Chinese and other non-European migrants forged connections not only with China but also with other parts of Southeast Asia and the Pacific, along which capital, commodities, information and ideas could flow as well as people, including the plants, tools and knowledge for establishing tropical agriculture. Andrew Leon, for example, had learned about tropical agriculture working in Jamaica before coming to Queensland, and when he converted the Hop Wah Plantation from cotton to sugar he first took advice from a friend in Honolulu (Bolton and Cronin 1974; *Capricornian*, November 16, 1901).

More prosaically, Chinese foods, pastimes and goods were introduced to Queensland, some becoming curiosities for European-Australian consumers. The *Cairns Post* ran two features on Chinese food (*CMP*, December 21, 1907; *CP*, September 28, 1909), and in an earlier piece on Christmas shopping, listed among the novelties available at the European-owned 'Red Arcade' Chinese lanterns, Chinese fireworks and 'sets of ping pong, or table tennis, which had come so greatly in favour of late' (*MP*, December 20, 1901, 5). Equally, returning Chinese migrants exported European and Australian consumer items back to

China—one being recorded as taking in 1915 an Australian-made bicycle and a gramophone with 200 gramophone records (Forday 1998)—sent remittances and bought land in China (Forday 1998). The practice led opponents to accuse them of siphoning the wealth of northern Queensland's agricultural resources, but in reality restrictions on land-ownership by Chinese in Australia left them with little option for investing their earned capital. As such, the Chinese migrants became agents of transformation in rural districts in two countries, enacting a 'rural cosmopolitanism' as they did so.

Conviviality and inter-cultural connections

The identification of cosmopolitanism in the Cairns districts requires more than the cosmopolitan performance of its Chinese farmers and demands also the expression of conviviality in relations between Europeans, Chinese and other residents. Here, conviviality is understood as the habitual practices of exchange and hospitality between cultural groups, and the ensuing sense of social togetherness that Noble (2013) aligns with cosmopolitanism (and which may fall short of Gilroy's (2004) positing of conviviality as a post-colonial condition where ethnic and racial differences become irrelevant).

The nature of agricultural development in northern Queensland necessitated trading relations between Chinese farmers and merchants and European-Australian businesses and residents (May 1984), but in some cases commercial interactions developed beyond trading exchanges to business partnerships. Prominent Chinese grower Tam Sie, for instance, unsuccessfully bid to buy the Mourilyan Sugar Mill in 1906 with two European-Australian partners (Yuangfang 2001), and several Chinese farmers on the failed Hop Wah estate invested in a rice mill constructed by an Irish entrepreneur in the 1880s (Bolton and Cronin 1974). Moreover, as May (1976a, 1984) observes, there is evidence that business contacts grew into social actions as presents were exchanged and the practice evolved of European-Australians visiting Chinese partners, tenants and neighbours on Sundays and at Christmas and Chinese New Year. Perhaps more mundanely, *The Queenslander* (January 30, 1909, 29) commented that James Ah Ching—a notable Chinese farmer and identity—'used to drink champagne with his white friends, who thought a lot of him', before his businesses failed.

Although the predominantly male composition of the Chinese community in Cairns (in the 1901 census there were only 61 Chinese women in the district) meant that marriages and births were rare, when they did occur they became occasions for hospitality, with reports of European guests joining lavish celebrations (*CP*, June 16, 1910; *MP*, June 3, 1907; *NQR*, August 19, 1896; *QT*, August 15, 1896; *TDB*, September 19, 1907). Significantly, European participation in these events was more than passive, crossing cultural boundaries to eat Chinese food, partake in Chinese traditions, and endorse proceedings. The toast at the feast to celebrate the first Chinese child born in Cairns was given by prominent Scottish-born farmer and journalist Archie Meston, who remarked that 'the Chinese, as a nation, represented a civilization of 1000 years, and the Chinese in Cairns were good law abiding citizens' (*NQR*, August 19, 1896, 22); whilst the best man at the wedding of Patrick Gee Kee, Chinese manager of the Green Hills Plantation, in 1906 was a European cane-grower (Ling 2001).

Patrick Gee Kee's wedding was also notable for his marriage to a half-Chinese, half-English bride. Inter-racial marriages were unusual, but exceptions included prominent

figures. Chinese pioneers Andrew Leon and James Ah Ching both married European women (which enabled them to become naturalised citizens), and Leon's daughters also married Europeans (Bolton and Cronin 1974; *Queenslander*, January 30, 1909). More informal liaisons were also noted, sometimes with scandalised inflection. A visitor writing in the anti-Chinese *Worker* newspaper, for example, reported that on arriving in Cairns:

the first thing that I noticed whilst walking up the street was a black Cinghalese arm-in-arm with a young white woman ... When I spoke to people of the town about it they told me that there were dozens of young white women living with all kinds of the black and yellow curse in Northern Queensland. (*Worker*, March 23, 1901, 2)

Such reports provoked rumours in other parts of Australia of widespread miscegenation in northern Queensland, which other visitors felt compelled to refute (*MP*, October 1, 1901) (see also Bagnall 2002, 2011).

Relatedly, the few Chinese children in the district were educated in the same schools as European-Australian children, as noted by a Cairns teacher in an interview with the *Brisbane Daily Mail*, reproduced in the *Cairns Post*:

one can gather some idea of the liberal nature of the education policy ... when in some of the northern schools Japanese, Chinese and coloured children are admitted. There are not many, of course, but no distinctions are shown, and they study side by side with the white children. (*CP*, January 29, 1916, 6)

A newspaper report of a gala at Mossman School, in which children dressed in their national costume, listed among participants two Chinese, two Japanese and four Indians, as well as English, Scottish, Finns, Serbians, Belgians, Italians, French, Irish and Australians (*CP*, October 25, 1918), whilst Chinese children were also recorded as school prize- and scholarship-winners in newspaper reports. Interestingly, there appears to be no questioning of the mixed education policy in the local press, though the exclusion of several Chinese boys at Cairns State School who were discovered to be above the leaving age of 14 was reported in 1902 (*MP*, October 14, 1902).

Similarly, the whole community was served by the same hospitals, and although a visiting committee in 1888 recommended the creation of a separate ward for Chinese and Pacific Islander patients at Cairns Hospital (*CP*, November 21, 1888), May (1984) notes that 'segregation was apparently not complete' (140). Certainly, the Chinese community were keen supporters of the local hospitals, with generous donations to hospital funds noted on several occasions (*CP*, November 13, 1914, January 22, 1918; *CMP*, July 24, 1908), as well as to a range of other charitable causes including churches, school sports, shows and collections for patriotic funds and flood relief (May 1984). European businesses equally donated towards Chinese causes (May 1984).

Fundraising by the Chinese included processions and events that themselves became embedded into local cultural life over time. Reports of Chinese New Year festivities in the *Cairns Post*, for example, moved from outrage at the nuisance of fireworks in the 1890s to accounts of mixed Chinese and European crowds and anticipatory notices after 1900 (e.g. *CP*, February 3, 1892; *MP*, February 11, 1902, February 11, 1907). Chinese fireworks were incorporated in the town's official Christmas celebrations in 1907 (*CMP*, December 28, 1907), and a Chinese procession was included in the annual carnival (*CMP*, July 22, 1908). Events to welcome visiting dignitaries also involved

Chinese contributions, with the Chinese community presenting gifts and using the opportunity to demonstrate allegiance to the Australian and British states (*MP*, September 17, 1901, June 9, 1903).

Social interactions between European and Chinese residents in the Cairns district hence extended beyond the necessities of commerce, and displayed in general terms a degree of conviviality. Yet there were limits. May comments that inter-cultural connections ‘seldom reached the proportions of friendship between equals’ and that as a rule, ‘it was the Chinese who offered hospitality and the Europeans who condescended to accept it’ (May 1976b, 281). Relations were also stratified by class. Wealthier Chinese merchants, for instance, were permitted to travel in the same first class rail carriages as Europeans, but second and third class carriages were strictly segregated (May 1976b), and more generally it was the European and Chinese elite who fraternised with each other, not workers. Moreover, interactions were evidently understood as being between two distinct, separate cultural groups, whose perceptions of each other were framed by contemporary discourses of race, as discussed further in the next section.

Contested cosmopolitan attitudes

The apparent conviviality of social relations in Cairns district belied the persistence of widespread perceptions among the European community that the Chinese and other races were inferior and threatening. Yet neither would it be accurate to suggest that residents simply reproduced the racist discourse of ‘White Australia’ without criticism or reflection. The documentary evidence of newspaper reports and letters, political speeches and memoirs indicates that a more complex assemblage of varying, ambiguous and sometimes contradictory ideas and attitudes towards race formed part of the public discourse of the region. The press itself was not a neutral vehicle for such representations, but was actively involved in reproducing and shaping opinion, and exhibited similarly inconsistent positions. Of the main local newspapers, the *Cairns Argus* was regarded as sympathetic to the Chinese and the *Cairns Advocate* as hostile, whilst the inclinations of the *Cairns Post* shifted with time, ownership and political context (May 1974). Virulently anti-Chinese in the early 1890s when the then editor employed accusations of pro-Chinese sentiment to discredit local political opponents (May 1984), the *Post* adopted a more nuanced position after being bought by A. J. Draper, a leading business and political figure, in 1893. Its feud with anti-Chinese parliamentarian Thomas Givens, proprietor of the rival *Advocate*, led it to defend the Chinese farmers on occasion, yet it also continued to publish articles hostile to the Chinese, often in the same issue.

Broadly, four, not entirely exclusive, positions can be identified circulating in turn-of-the-century Cairns. The first is outright racism and hostility to the Chinese, which despite the district’s tolerant reputation nonetheless found expression in public meetings, political speeches and the editorials and letters columns of newspapers. Particular opposition came from European farmers who considered themselves to be in competition with Chinese farmers for land and markets, accusing the Chinese of unfair practice, and campaigning for them to be excluded from farming (*CP*, February 18, 1891; *MP*, June 30, 1897, March 22, 1899, May 16, 1905). The farmers were championed by Thomas Givens, an Irish-born trade union leader elected as Member of the Queensland Legislative Assembly

for Cairns in 1898, who unsuccessfully proposed a Bill to prohibit the leasing of land to non-naturalised Chinese (*BC*, October 25, 1901).

However, hostility towards the Chinese did not go unchallenged. Anti-Chinese advocates who employed or leased land to Chinese were accused of hypocrisy (*MP*, March 22, 1899) and dock-workers overheard abusing the Chinese whilst unloading Chinese-grown bananas were ridiculed in the press (*MP*, January 20, 1898). An attempt to mobilise an anti-Chinese movement in 1886 also failed, with the *Cairns Post* commenting that 'it is acknowledged the Chinese here have been the means of advancing the district by their agricultural pursuits, instead of injuring the working classes of Cairns, and they fill a position which the European refuses to fill' (*CP*, December 2, 1886, 2).

Thus a second position articulated a pragmatic defence of the Chinese as vital to the economic interests of the region. Statements of this opinion were often qualified by broader allusions to the inferiority of the Chinese or a preference for European settlers, but argued that in the absence of willing white labour the Chinese filled a necessary role. As one correspondent to the *Cairns Post* wrote:

who, or where, are the eager competitors who would be willing to undertake the drudgery of the Chinaman on the same terms provided we expelled him tomorrow? In what sense can he be said to be injuring white labour if this latter is not there to step in and take his place? (*CP*, February 18, 1886, 3)

Cairns, it was further argued, owed its prosperity to Chinese farmers, and they hence deserved respect (*CP*, February 18, 1886, March 6, 1913; *MP*, May 26, 1905; *NQR*, November 5, 1900).

A third position similarly accommodated allusions to racial difference, but emphasised the rule of law. In an area where colonial authority had been established for less than half a century, proponents of this view sought to uphold adherence to British legal institutions and values, including tolerance within the law. Magistrates and police in Cairns were repeatedly accused during the 1890s of favouring Chinese residents (e.g. *CP*, November 8, 1890, February 11, 1891), but as May observes: 'the substance of [...] accusations indicates that the magistrate was at fault in not being biased in favour of Europeans' (May 1984, 142). Furthermore, Chinese residents were extended the protection of the law, with several convictions of Europeans for assaulting Chinese men (*CP*, July 20, 1910, November 19, 1910; *CMP*, January 13, 1909), and the prosecution of a police officer for robbing a Chinese man (*MP*, April 20, 1907). When anti-Chinese campaigner John Potts organised a meeting in Cairns in 1886, French-born Mayor Louis Severin responded by notifying Potts that the meeting was illegal (it went ahead with a large police presence) (Potts 1887).

Equally important was defending the rights of Chinese property-owners as rate-payers. A move to reserve municipal contracts for Europeans was opposed by some councillors on the grounds that 'there were Chinese ratepayers in the borough and it was harsh, un-English, or rather un-British, to exclude them from tendering' (*CP*, September 8, 1888, 2). Similarly, efforts to prohibit Chinese rate-payers from voting in municipal elections were repeatedly defeated, with the *Cairns Post* commenting after one attempt that 'this absurd attempt to interfere with the liberty of the rate-paying subjects very naturally fell to the ground' (*CP*, May 20, 1891, 2).

The above three positions, whilst articulating contrasting opinions, all stopped short of a truly cosmopolitan attitude to cultural difference. Evidence for this fourth perspective—the unqualified acceptance of Chinese migrants—is elusive; but absence from documented records does not necessarily mean it did not exist. There are suggestions in reported social interactions that friendship and acceptance between European and Chinese residents did occur, at least on a personal level. Local European leaders provided glowing and generous references for Chinese farmers and merchants seeking naturalisation, and May notes ‘that relations of genuine mutual affection seem to have developed between some farmers’ families and Chinese tenants, particularly the elderly and genial ones’ (May 1974, 135). In this way, there are signs that residents of the Cairns district negotiated their way around multiple cultural spaces, creating their own cultural world, recognising shared interests with others on occasion, but also able to differentiate between public collective discourse and private practice.

The frontier factor

The evidence outlined above points to the presence of a partial and contested cosmopolitanism in the Cairns district, which contrasts sharply with the White Australia discourse that prevailed in other parts of the country at the time. This can largely be explained by the rural and frontier setting of the district. As a peripheral region still undergoing colonial settlement, the Cairns district formed a liminal space remote from metropolitan politics and at the edge of State surveillance. Rumours that circulated in southern cities of secret Chinese colonies, widespread mixed-race relationships, and Chinese displacement of white settlers were exaggerated or inaccurate, but the same information void moderated the pressure on residents in the district to conform to political and moral fashions. Secondly, the small population necessitated contact between residents of different cultures and the shared use of schools, hospitals, churches and post offices. Cairns and other towns had ‘Chinatowns’, yet these were single streets adjacent to European residential areas; only at Atherton was the Chinatown physically separate to the main town. In rural areas, the selections of European and Chinese farmers were interspersed, and neighbourly co-operation was required to cope with the often hostile environment.

Thirdly, and most importantly, the engagement of both European and Chinese farmers in the agricultural transformation of the frontier engendered a sense of shared endeavour. Debates raged as to whether European settlers were temperamentally unsuited to tropical field work, or just unwilling to labour under the difficult conditions, but it was agreed by all but the most militant racists that Chinese farmers had been instrumental in clearing and cultivating land. As a letter to the *Cairns Post* argued:

The Aloomba line was opened up by the Chinese, second the Barron, and third Atherton, beside all other places, and now they want ‘White Australia’. People say that Chinese take money out of the country, because they see them going home for trips, but look how they work for this country and open it up when they are here. (CP, March 6, 1913, 3)

Chinese farmers were the first to plant sugar-cane and bananas in the region, and experimented less successfully with cotton, rice and rubber. Entrepreneurs such as Andrew Leon and Tam Sie accordingly revelled in the identity of ‘pioneer’—Leon using the term to describe himself in testimony to a Royal Commission in 1901 (*Capricornian*, November

16, 1901), and Tam Sie crafting memoirs which portrayed himself alongside European partners as ‘all colonisers of the land, with the rest working for them’ (Yuanfang 2001, 54). As Yuanfang continues, ‘in this kind of representation, Australia becomes a site of coexistence for the colonisers, white and non-white, European and Chinese’ (Yuanfang 2001, 54).

The retreat of cosmopolitanism

The specificities of Cairns’s location and agricultural economy enabled the development of elements of an imperfect cosmopolitanism that set it apart from most of Australia at the start of the twentieth century, but they did not make it immune to external pressures. White nationalist publications in Brisbane and Sydney, such as *Boomerang* and the *Bulletin*, frequently ran pieces disparaging the Cairns district as a weak point in White Australia (Evans, Saunders, and Cronin 1993). Such articles were commonly reproduced in the Cairns press, often without comment. Occasionally, the *Cairns Post* was provoked to defend the region, albeit somewhat equivocally with respect to support for the Chinese (see, for example, *MP*, July 8, 1897). Other times, external reports were presented as evidence—‘as others see us’—to chide the district for its lax attitudes towards Chinese immigration (*CP*, March 21, 1891). As such, external representations served to chip away at cosmopolitan resolve.

More directly, a series of legislation introduced by the new Australian Commonwealth from 1901 served to restrict Chinese immigration and regulate the Chinese in northern Queensland. The *Immigration Restriction Act 1901* introduced a dictation test, requiring new immigrants to write out a passage dictated in a European language; the *Nationality Act 1903* prohibited the naturalisation of non-Europeans; the *Sugar Bounty Act 1905* excluded Chinese workers from plantations; and the *Sugar Cultivation Act 1901* extended the prohibition to all non-Europeans working in all aspects of the sugar industry. The impact of these measures was severe but incremental. Records for northern Queensland ports show that there was no mass repatriation of Chinese migrants; rather, the level of departures of Chinese remained steady as cyclical migrants returned home to China, but arrivals dropped as numbers of new and repeat migrants fell (Figure 3).

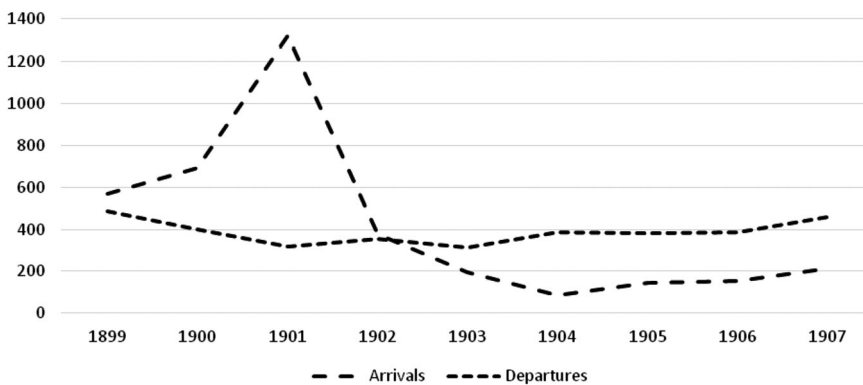


Figure 3. Arrival and departure of Chinese passengers from north Queensland ports (Cairns, Cooktown, Geraldton, Port Douglas, Townsville), 1899–1907. Source: Queensland Government (1908).

Table 2. Police census of Chinese residents in the Cairns district, 1909

| Police station | Number of Chinese | Increase since 1901 | Decrease since 1901 |
|----------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Cairns | 450 | – | 1000 |
| Atherton | 1000 | 750 | – |
| Geraldton | 700 | – | 150 |
| Hambledon | 64 | 60 | – |
| Kuranda | – | – | 1 |
| Mareeba | 35 | – | Slight |
| Mossman | 80 | – | 200 |
| Port Douglas | 46 | – | 23 |

Source: Queensland Government (1909).

A police census conducted in 1909 to assess the effect of the *Immigration Restriction Act* recorded little change in the overall numbers of Chinese residents in the far north of Queensland, but revealed a change in their geographical distribution (Table 2) (Queensland Government 1909). In and around Cairns, the number of Chinese residents had decreased from around 1450 in 1901 to 450 in 1909, a change reflecting reductions in new immigrants who might have initially lodged in the town and to the shifting agricultural geography. Chinese leases in the Cairns area were coming to term, with land returned to European owners. As most suitable land around the town was already cultivated, the opportunities for Chinese farmers to acquire new leases were limited, compelling them to move on.

The focus of new land selections shifted to the Atherton Tablelands, inland from Cairns, and the number of Chinese residents in this area increased by around 750 between 1901 and 1909. However, the re-centring of the Chinese community to Atherton itself challenged the nascent cosmopolitanism. Relations between Europeans and Chinese had always been less amicable in Atherton than in Cairns, reflecting the former’s proximity to mining areas and its different agricultural economy. The main crop in the sub-tropical Tablelands was maize, and thus more familiar to European farmers. Land was still leased to Chinese tenants, but was commonly cleared by European owners first and then leased for Chinese farmers to cultivate whilst the owner moved on to new properties (MP, January 6, 1906; *Queenslander*, February 17, 1906). As such, the argument that Chinese migrants were needed for work that Europeans could not do had less purchase.

Indeed, the opening-up of the Tablelands attracted not only Chinese farmers from the coast but also European farmers from New South Wales with engrained anti-Chinese attitudes (Collinson 1941). The latter accused the Chinese of unfair competition, complaining that they grouped together to outbid Europeans for leases, cheated by working at night and on Sundays, and drove down prices by living more frugally (CP, September 21, 1909, March 18, 1911). The new European arrivals organised as the so-called ‘White Atherton’ movement, which gained notoriety in 1908 with an incident in which a telegram was sent reporting an anti-Chinese uprising at Atherton, with Chinese farmers evicted and houses burned. The telegram was quickly confirmed as a hoax, but not after the news had been printed by several Australian newspapers (CMP, November 9, 1908). The hoax appears to have been a clumsy attempt at provocation, but succeeded largely in exposing differences in the European population, as one older settler told the *Cairns Morning Post*:

the whole thing was the outcome of the irresponsible utterances of a few new arrivals who didn’t know what they were talking about ... ‘I am as good a democrat as any of them,’

said Mr. Martin, 'but I am not foolish enough to advocate the hunting out of the Chinese. It is only the old Northerners who can realise what they have done for Atherton in the past. I for one fail so see what we would have done without them.' It is the height of impertinence for these new arrivals in the North to tell us, old Northerners, who have battled along through years of hardship and depression, what is good for us. (*CMP*, November 14, 1908, 4)

Chinese farmers persisted on the Tablelands until the 1920s, when land was appropriated for war veterans, but across the Cairns district the Chinese population had fallen to under 1000 individuals by 1921 (Commonwealth of Australia 1921) as the combined effects of immigration restrictions and reduced opportunities hit. The migration of Chinese from the district to Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney contributed to the urbanisation of the Chinese population in Australia, and in the Cairns district the community became increasingly concentrated, especially in the settlement of Malaytown on the southern side of Cairns. Originally established by Malay migrants in the 1880s, by the 1920s Malaytown hosted a diverse community of Malays, Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Indigenous Australians, Jamaicans, Filipinos and Pacific Islanders who struggled to find accommodation elsewhere (Hodes 1998). The community persisted until after the Second World War, yet its segregation from the main town was such that Hodes remarks that 'it appears that many Cairns residents were not aware that Malaytown existed' (Hodes 1998, 8).

Only more affluent Chinese residents had access to a different option, moving from lifestyles that already hybridised aspects of Chinese and European-Australian culture—wearing European clothes with Chinese pigtailed; speaking English in public and Chinese in private—to the full adoption of mainstream Australian practice. A grandchild of agriculturalists Patrick Gee Kee and Low Choy, for example, recalls that his parents and grandparents

deliberately refrained from handing down various aspects of Chinese culture to their children. That was how they coped: by fully assimilating ... We ate very little Chinese food at home, and what we did eat was very much an adaptation of the real thing. Whilst my mother had some sets of chopsticks, we never used them. (Darryl Low Choy, in Ling 2001, 62)

The strategy of assimilation enabled survival, but it was also a repudiation of cosmopolitanism, abandoning efforts at the co-existence of cultural difference.

Conclusion

The Cairns district of northern Queensland at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was characterised by a partial, contested and precarious rural cosmopolitanism. The peripheral location and distinctive tropical agricultural economy facilitated social and commercial interactions between European and Chinese residents in particular that exhibited features of boundary-crossing, conviviality and the negotiation of cultural difference that can be described as cosmopolitan; yet these were framed by hegemonic ideas on race of the time, and cross-cut by ambiguous, pragmatic and often inconsistent public expressions of opinion about the Chinese. In itself, the account presented here contributes to the growing literature uncovering the complexities of non-European experiences in Australia, but it also demonstrates the potential for historical geography research to inform understanding of twenty-first-century questions.

In spite of the clear cultural and political contrasts in attitudes towards race at the turn of the twentieth century and today, there are nonetheless striking parallels between aspects of the dynamics of immigration and cultural difference in late colonial Cairns and the present-day experiences and politics of immigration and cultural difference in rural areas of Australia, New Zealand, Europe and North America. The cyclical nature of Chinese migration to Queensland, the practice of sending remittances, and migrants' aim of working in Queensland to build a better life in China were unfamiliar at the time, but are replicated by twenty-first-century migrant workers (see, for example, Gidwani and Sivaramakrishnan 2003; Skaptadóttir and Wojtyńska 2008; Pye et al. 2012; Argent and Tonts 2015). The political discourse mobilised by the 'White Australian' opponents of Chinese immigration similarly has resonance in the rhetoric of twenty-first-century anti-immigration politics, notably exaggerated fears of overwhelming volumes of migrants, crime and cultural dilution, as do the accusations by white farmers and agitators that Chinese migrants were taking work from Europeans and undercutting wages and prices by accepting lower incomes and working longer hours (cf. Jordan, Krivokapic-Skoko, and Collins 2011; Torres, Popke and Hapke 2006; Woods 2016). Equally, examples of more open, hospitable and convivial relations between races in the Cairns district prefigure similarly counter-hegemonic articulations of cosmopolitan dispositions observed in the recent literature on rural cosmopolitanism (Popke 2011; Schech 2014; Woods 2017).

The emergent, partial and contested rural cosmopolitanism of late colonial Queensland was far from the ideal of cosmopolitan theory, but so is the 'actually-existing cosmopolitanism' of twenty-first-century rural and urban societies (Robbins 1998; Ley 2004; Woods 2017). In common with the proto-cosmopolitanism identified in eighteenth-century Jamaica by Robertson (2014) or in early twentieth-century Ladakh by Fewkes (2012), the cosmopolitanism of late colonial Cairns was a cosmopolitanism of its time: partial, imperfect, constrained by cultural norms, and precarious. Indeed, it is its partiality and precarity that makes the case especially pertinent to contemporary debates around immigration and rural communities. It is important to note not only that ethnic and cultural diversity existed in remote rural areas such as Cairns over a century ago—thus challenging attempts to portray twenty-first-century immigration to rural districts as 'alien' or unprecedented—but also that it was suppressed by the combination of changing economic conditions, externally driven political pressures, and the adoption of assimilation as a survival strategy by Chinese migrants. As such, the story of the Chinese farmers of Cairns points to the precarity of rural cosmopolitanism in the face of shifting social, economic and political circumstances, both then and now, and thus contributes to the development of a more nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism in rural studies.

Notes

1. Three other newspapers published in Cairns during the period, namely the *Cairns Advocate*, the *Cairns Argus* and the *Trinity Times* (later the *Cairns Daily Times*), are not archived in the TROVE digital archive.
2. The term 'European' here and elsewhere in the paper includes individuals born in Australia of European descent.
3. The figures relate to the 'recorded population' as the census systematically under-counted the Aboriginal population, including only individuals resident in camps or hostels. The 1901

census recorded 300 Aborigines in the Cairns census district, but the actual number is likely to have been significantly higher, thus affecting the total population and the figures quoted for the proportion of other ethnic groups in the local population.

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